

# IT Buyers Guide



# ***The Business Owner's Guide To IT Support And Services***

## **What You Should Expect To Pay For IT Support For Your Business**

**(And How To Get *Exactly* What You Need  
*Without* Unnecessary Extras, Hidden Fees Or  
Bloated Contracts)**

### **Read this guide and you'll discover:**

- ✓ The three most common ways IT services companies charge for their services, and the pros and cons of each approach.
- ✓ A common billing model that puts ALL THE RISK on you, the customer, when buying IT services; you'll learn what it is and why you need to avoid agreeing to it.
- ✓ Exclusions, hidden fees and other "gotcha" clauses IT companies put in their contracts that you DON'T want to agree to.
- ✓ How to make sure you know exactly what you're getting to avoid disappointment, frustration and unanticipated added future costs.
- ✓ 21 revealing questions to ask your IT support firm BEFORE giving them access to your computer network, e-mail and data.



**From the Desk of:**

**Bryan Christensen**  
**President**  
**CHR Creative**

If you are the owner or executive manager of a business that is currently looking to outsource some or all of the IT support for your company, this report contains important information that will be extremely valuable to you as you search for a competent firm you can trust.

My name is Bryan Christensen, President of CHR Creative. We've been providing IT services to businesses in the Pacific Northwest area since 2006. You may not have heard of us before, but I'm sure you're familiar with one or more of the businesses that are clients of ours. A few of their comments are enclosed.

**One of the most common questions we get from prospective clients calling our office is, "What do you guys charge for your services?"** Because this is such a common question – and a very important one to address – I decided to write this report for three reasons:

**1.**

I wanted an easy way to answer this question and educate all prospective clients who come to us on the most common ways IT services companies package and price their services and the pros and cons of each approach.

**2.**

I desired to bring to light a few industry secrets about IT services contracts and SLAs (service level agreements) that almost no business owner thinks about, understands or knows to ask about when evaluating IT services providers. Not knowing this information can end up burning you with hidden fees and locking you into a long-term contract when they are unwilling or unable to deliver the quality of service you need.

**3.**

I wished to educate owners and business managers on picking the **right** IT services company for their specific situation. The budget must be based on the **VALUE** the company can deliver, not just the high or low price.

Ultimately, my purpose is to help you make the most informed decision possible so you end up working with a company that enables you to solve your problems and accomplish what you want in a time frame, manner, and budget that is right for you.

Dedicated to serving you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bryan Christensen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Bryan Christensen

## About The Author

Bryan's journey into the world of IT began early in his life, taking computer classes in elementary school and discovering a passion for science and the outdoors as a Cub and later and Boy Scout. He excelled in scouting and was recognized with the Eagle Scout Award before graduating high school.

After completing his secondary education, Bryan joined the US Navy and earned the Navy Achievement Medal for contributions to computerizing the Naval Hospital Great Lakes IL. Following his military service, he continued to pursue his IT education and worked for several consulting and IT services companies before establishing CHR Creative in 2006 as a technical consulting firm.



Bryan Christensen serves as the President of CHR Creative, LLC, and he has extensive experience as an IT specialist and network engineer, spanning over 30 years in the IT services industry. Throughout his illustrious career, Bryan has worked with local and federal government agencies, and has provided support to more than 2,000 Businesses across 100 diverse industries, ranging from small start-ups to multinational corporations such as Intel, Microsoft, Legacy, and Providence Health Systems.

In 2010, in response to customer demands, CHR Creative began shifting its focus towards cybersecurity, along with providing managed IT services and support. Since then, the company has expanded its scope of services to become a comprehensive provider of managed IT and Cybersecurity services. Today, CHR Creative caters to the needs of businesses and local government organizations with complex compliance and cybersecurity requirements.

Under Bryan's leadership, CHR Creative earned a spot on the Top 100 Fastest Growing Companies list by the Portland Business Journal in 2015, 2016, 2020, and 2021. Additionally, in recognition of his professional expertise, Bryan was appointed as Chairman of the Associated Technologies Council in 2014.

Today, CHR Creative serves Portland, Oregon, and Vancouver, Washington, and surrounding areas, as well as several international clients and those located in over twenty-three states.

# Comparing Apples To Apples: The Predominant IT Service Models Explained

Before you can accurately compare the fees, services and deliverables of one IT services company with another, you need to understand the three predominant service models within which most of these companies fit. Some companies offer a blend of all three, while others are strict about offering only one service plan. The three predominant service models are:

- **Time and Materials.** In the industry, we call this “break-fix” services. Essentially you pay an agreed-upon hourly rate for a technician to fix your problem when something breaks. Under this model you might be able to negotiate a discount based on buying a block of hours. The scope of work may be simply to resolve a specific problem, such as fixing a problem with your e-mail, or it may encompass a large project, like a network upgrade or move that has a specific result and end date clarified. Some companies will offer staff augmentation and placement under this model as well.
- **Managed IT Services.** This is a model where the IT services company takes the role of your fully outsourced IT department and not only installs and supports all the devices and PCs that connect to your server(s), but also offers phone and on-site support, antivirus, cyber security, backup and a host of other services to monitor and maintain the health, speed, performance and security of your computer network.
- **Software Vendor-Supplied IT Services.** Many software companies will offer IT support for their customers in the form of a help desk or remote support for an additional fee. These are typically scaled-back services, though, limited to troubleshooting their specific application and NOT your entire computer network and all the applications and devices connected to it. If your problem resides outside of their specific software or the server it’s hosted on, they can’t help you and will often refer you to “your IT department.” While it’s often a good idea to buy some basic-level support package with a critical software application you use to run your business, this is not enough to provide the full IT services and support most businesses need to stay up and running.



When looking to outsource your IT support, the two service models you are most likely to end up having to choose between are the managed IT services and break-fix models. Therefore, let’s dive into the pros and cons of these two options and the typical fee structure for both.

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## Managed IT Services Vs. Break-Fix: Which Is The Better, More Cost-Effective Option?

You've probably heard the famous Benjamin Franklin quote, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." I couldn't agree more – and that's why I sincerely believe that some form of managed IT is essential for every business.



In our company, we offer different plans to fit the needs of our clients. In some cases, where the business is small, we might offer a very basic managed services plan to ensure the most essential maintenance is done, then bill the client hourly for any support used. For our smallest clients, they often find this the most economical. But for some of our midsized organizations, we offer a fully managed approach where more comprehensive IT services are covered in a managed plan. By doing this, we can properly staff for their accounts and ensure they get the fast, responsive support and expertise they need.

The only time I would recommend a "time and materials" approach is when you already have a competent IT person or team proactively managing your computer network and simply have a specific IT project to complete that your current in-house IT team doesn't have the time nor expertise to implement (such as migrating to a cloud-based solution, implementing a cyber security plan, etc.). Outside of that specific scenario, I do not think the break-fix approach is a good idea for general IT support for one very important, fundamental reason: you'll ultimately end up paying for a pound of cure for problems that could have easily been avoided with an ounce of prevention.

## Why Regular Monitoring And Maintenance Is Critical For Today's Computer Networks

The fact of the matter is computer networks absolutely, positively need ongoing maintenance and monitoring to stay secure. The ever-increasing dependency we have on IT systems and the data they hold – not to mention the *type* of data we're now saving digitally – has given rise to very smart and sophisticated cybercrime organizations that work around the clock to do one thing: hack into your network to steal data or money or to hold you ransom.

As you may know, ransomware is at an all-time high because hackers make millions of tax-free dollars robbing one small business owner at a time. But that's not their only incentive.



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Some will attempt to hack your network to gain access to bank accounts, credit cards or passwords to rob you (and your clients). Some use your computer network to send spam using YOUR domain and servers, host pirated software and, of course, spread viruses. Some even do it just for the fun of it.

And don't think for a minute these cybercriminals are solo crooks working alone in a hoodie out of their basement. They are highly organized and well-run operations employing *teams* of hackers who work together to scam as many people as they can. They use advanced software that scans millions of networks for vulnerabilities and use readily available data on the dark web of YOUR usernames, passwords, e-mail addresses and other data to gain access.

Of course, this isn't the only IT danger you face. Other common IT disasters include rogue employees, lost devices, hardware failures (still a BIG reason for data loss), fire and natural disasters and a host of other issues that can interrupt or outright destroy your IT infrastructure and the data it holds. Then there's regulatory compliance for any business hosting or touching credit card or financial information, medical records and even client contact information, such as e-mail addresses.

Preventing these problems and keeping your systems up and running (which is what managed IT services is all about) is a LOT less expensive and damaging to your organization than waiting until one of these things happens and then paying for emergency IT services to restore your systems to working order (break-fix).

## Should You Just Hire A Full-Time IT Manager?

In most cases, it is not cost-effective for companies with under 100 employees to hire a full-time IT person for several reasons.

First of all, no one IT person can know everything there is to know about IT support and cyber security. If your company is big enough and growing fast enough to support a full-time IT lead, you probably need more than one guy. You need someone with help-desk expertise as well as a network engineer, a network administrator, a CIO (chief information officer), and a CISO (chief information security officer).



Therefore, even if you hire a full-time IT person, you may still need to supplement their position with co-managed IT support using an IT firm that can fill in the gaps and provide services and expertise they don't have. This is not a bad plan; what IS a bad plan is hiring one person and expecting them to know it all and do it all.

Second, finding and hiring good people is difficult; finding and hiring skilled IT people is incredibly difficult due to the skill shortage for IT. And if you're not technical, it's going to be very difficult for you to interview candidates and sift and sort through all the duds out there to find someone with good skills and experience. Because you're not technical, you might not know the right questions to ask during the interview process or the skills they need to do the job.

More often than not, the hard and soft costs of building an internal IT department for general IT support just don't provide the best return on investment for the average small to midsize business. An internal IT department typically doesn't make sense until you have closer to 100 employees OR you have unique circumstances and need specialized skills (e.g., a developer), but not for day-to-day IT support and maintenance.

## Why “Break-Fix” Works Entirely In The Consultant’s Favor, Not Yours

Under a “break-fix” model, there is a fundamental conflict of interests between you and your IT firm. The IT services company has no incentive to prevent problems, stabilize your network, or resolve problems quickly because they are getting paid by the hour when things stop working; therefore, the risk of unforeseen circumstances, scope creep, learning curve inefficiencies, and outright incompetence are all shifted to YOU, the customer. Essentially, the more problems you have, the more they profit, which is precisely what you DON’T want.



Under this model, the IT consultant can take the liberty of assigning a junior (lower-paid) technician to work on your problem – one who may take two to three times as long to resolve an issue that a more senior (and more expensive) technician might resolve in a fraction of the time. There is no incentive to properly manage the time of that technician or their efficiency, and there is every reason for them to prolong the project and find MORE problems than solutions. Of course, if they’re ethical and want to keep you as a client, they *should* be doing everything possible to resolve your problems quickly and efficiently; however, that’s akin to putting a German shepherd in charge of watching over the ham sandwiches. Not a good idea.

Second, it creates a management problem for you, the customer, who now has to keep track of the hours they’ve worked to make sure you aren’t getting overbilled, and since you often have no way of really knowing if they’ve worked the hours they say they have, it creates a situation where you really, truly need to be able to trust they are being 100% ethical and honest AND tracking THEIR hours properly (not all do).

And finally, it makes budgeting for IT projects and expenses a nightmare since they may be zero one month and thousands the next.

## What Should You Expect To Pay?

**Important!** Please note that the following price quotes are industry averages based on a recent IT industry survey conducted of over 750 different IT services firms. We are providing this information to give you a general idea of what most IT services firms charge and to help you understand the VAST DIFFERENCES in service contracts that you must be aware of before signing on the dotted line. Please understand that this does NOT reflect our pricing model or approach, which is simply to understand exactly what you want to accomplish FIRST and then customize a solution based on your specific needs, budget and situation.



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## Hourly Break-Fix Fees:

Most IT services companies selling break-fix services charge between \$175 and \$250 per hour with a one-hour minimum. In most cases, they will give you a discount of 5% to as much as 20% on their hourly rates if you purchase and pay for a block of hours in advance.

If they quote a **project**, the fees range widely based on the scope of work outlined. If you are hiring an IT consulting firm for a project, I suggest you demand the following:

- **A very detailed scope of work that specifies what success is.** Make sure you detail what your expectations are in performance, workflow, costs, security, access, etc. The more detailed you can be, the better. Detailing your expectations up front will go a long way toward avoiding miscommunications and additional fees later on to give you what you REALLY wanted.
- **A fixed budget and time frame for completion.** Agreeing to this up front aligns both your agenda and the consultant's. Be very wary of loose estimates that allow the consulting firm to bill you for unforeseen circumstances. The bottom line is this: it is your IT consulting firm's responsibility to be able to accurately assess your situation and quote a project based on their experience. You should not have to pick up the tab for a consultant underestimating a job or for their inefficiencies. A true professional knows how to take into consideration those contingencies and bill accordingly.

**Warning! Beware the gray areas of "all-inclusive" service contracts.** In order to truly compare the cost of one managed IT services contract with another, you need to make sure you fully understand what IS and ISN'T included AND the SLA (service level agreement) you are signing up for. It's VERY easy for one IT services provider to appear less expensive than another UNTIL you look closely at what you're getting.

## Managed IT Services:

Most managed IT services firms will quote you a MONTHLY fee based on the number of devices they need to maintain, back up, and support. In the Pacific Northwest, that fee is somewhere in the range of \$100 to \$200 per server, \$50 to \$100 per desktop, and approximately \$10 per smartphone or mobile device.

If you hire an IT consultant and sign up for a managed IT services contract, here are some things that SHOULD be included (make sure you read your contract to validate this):

- Security patches applied weekly, if not daily, for urgent and emerging threats
- Antivirus updates and monitoring
- Firewall updates and monitoring
- Backup monitoring and test restores
- Spam-filter installation and updates
- Monitoring workstations and servers for signs of failure
- Optimizing systems for maximum speed
- Documentation of your network, software licenses, credentials, etc.

The following services may **NOT be included** and will often be billed separately. This is not necessarily a scam or unethical unless the managed IT services company tries to hide these fees when selling you a service agreement. Make sure you review your contract carefully to know what is and is NOT included!

- Hardware (ex. new servers), PCs, laptops, etc.
- Software licenses
- Special projects
- Onsite visits

The following are 21 questions to ask your IT services provider that will clarify exactly what you're getting for the money. Some of these items may not be that important to you, while others (like response time, adequate insurance and uptime guarantees) may be critical. Make sure you fully understand each of these items before making a decision about who the right provider is for you, then make sure you get this IN WRITING.

## 21 Questions You Should Ask Your IT Services Company Or Consultant Before Hiring Them For IT Support

### Customer Service:

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#### **Q1** When I have an IT problem, how do I get support?

**Our Answer:** When a client has a problem, we "open a ticket" in our IT management system so we can properly assign, track, prioritize, document and resolve client issues. However, some IT firms force you to log in to submit a ticket and won't allow you to call or e-mail them. This is for THEIR convenience, not yours. Trust me, this will become a giant inconvenience and thorn in your side. While a portal is a good option, it should never be your ONLY option for requesting support.

Also, make sure they HAVE a reliable system in place to keep track of client "tickets" and requests. If they don't, I can practically guarantee your requests will sometimes get overlooked, skipped and forgotten.

Requesting support should also be EASY for you. So be sure to ask how you can submit a problem to their support desk for resolution. We make it easy. Calling, e-mailing or submitting a ticket via our portal puts your IT issue on the fast track to getting resolved.

#### **Q2** Do you offer after-hours support, and if so, what is the guaranteed response time?

**Our Answer:** Any good IT company will answer their phones LIVE (not voice mail or require callbacks) and respond from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. every weekday. But many CEOs and executives work outside normal "9 to 5" hours and need IT support both nights and weekends. Not only can you reach our after-hours support any time and any day, but we also GUARANTEE a response time of one hour or less for normal problems and within 15 minutes for problems marked "emergency," such as a network being down or a critical problem that is significantly impacting your ability to work.



**Q3**

### **Do you have a written, guaranteed response time for working on resolving your problems?**

**Our Answer:** Most IT firms offer a 60-minute or 30-minute response time to your call during regular business hours. Be very wary of someone who doesn't have a guaranteed response time **IN WRITING** – that's a sign they are too disorganized, understaffed, or overwhelmed to handle your request. Our written, guaranteed response time is one hour or less. A good IT firm should also be able to show you statistics from their PSA (professional services automation) software, where all client problems (tickets) get responded to and tracked. Ask to see a report on average ticket response and resolution times.

**Q4**

### **Will I be given a dedicated account manager?**

**Our Answer:** Smaller firms may not offer this due to staff limitations, and the owner may tell you they will personally manage your account. While that *sounds* like great customer service, the owner is usually so busy that you'll only be given reactive support instead of proactive account management. Rest assured, from initial call to final resolution, you will work with our **SAME** dedicated account manager who will know you, your business and your goals.

**Q5**

### **Do you have a feedback system in place for your clients to provide "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" ratings on your service? If so, can I see those reports?**

**Our Answer:** If they don't have this type of feedback system, they may be hiding their lousy customer service results. If they **DO** have one, ask to see the actual scores and reporting. That will tell you a lot about the quality of service they are providing. We are very proud of our positive client feedback scores and will be happy to show them to you.



## **IT Maintenance (Managed Services):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Q6**

### **Do you offer true managed IT services and support?**

**Our Answer:** You want to find an IT company that will proactively monitor for problems and perform routine maintenance on your IT systems. If they don't have the ability to do this, or they don't offer it, we strongly recommend you look somewhere else. Our remote network monitoring system watches over your network to constantly look for developing problems, security issues and other problems so we can address them **BEFORE** they turn into bigger problems.

## Q7

# What is NOT included in your managed services agreement?

**Our Answer:** Another “gotcha” many IT companies fail to explain is what is NOT included in your monthly managed services agreement that will trigger an invoice. Their so-called “all you can eat” option is RARELY true – there are limitations to what’s included, and you want to know what they are BEFORE you sign.

It’s very common for projects to not be included, like a server upgrade, moving offices, adding new employees and, of course, the software and hardware you need to purchase.

**But here’s a question you need to ask: If you were hit with a costly ransomware attack, would the recovery be EXTRA or included in your contract? Recovering from a cyber-attack could take HOURS of high-level IT expertise. Who is going to eat that bill? Be sure you’re clear on this before you sign, because surprising you with a big, fat bill is totally and completely unacceptable.**

Other things to inquire about are:

- Do you offer truly unlimited help desk? (Make sure you are not nickel-and-dimed for every call.)
- Does the service include support for cloud services, such as Microsoft 365 or Google Business Suite?
- Do you charge extra if you have to resolve a problem with a line-of-business application, Internet service provider, phone system, leased printer, etc.? (What you want is an IT company that will own the problems and not point fingers. We are happy to call the vendor or software company on your behalf.)
- What about on-site support calls? Or support to remote offices?
- If our employees had to work remote (due to a shutdown, natural disaster, etc.), would you provide support on their home or would that trigger a bill?
- If we were to get ransomed or experience some other disaster (fire, flood, theft, tornado, hurricane, etc.), would rebuilding the network be included in the service plan or considered an extra project we would have to pay for? (Get this IN WRITING. Recovering from such a disaster could take hundreds of hours of time for your IT company’s techs, so you want to know in advance how a situation like this will be handled before it happens.)

Our managed services agreement is completely transparent.



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## Q8

### Is your help desk local or outsourced?

**Our Answer:** Be careful because smaller IT firms may outsource this critical function. As a result, you may get a tech who is not familiar with you, your network, previous problems and personal preferences. Or worse, they may not be as qualified. This can be frustrating and lead to the same problems cropping up over and over, longer resolution time and you having to spend time educating the tech on your account.

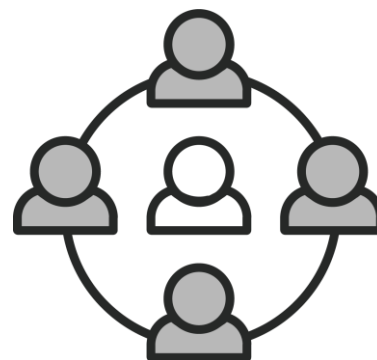
Our Company is pleased to offer dedicated technical resources and team to advise/manage your account. They will take the time to understand your organization, preferences and history, ensuring that you receive personalized and effective solutions to your IT needs. By working with our local team, you can be confident that your I.T addressed in a manner that aligns with your requirements and expectations.

## Q9

### How many engineers do you have on staff?

**Our Answer:** Be careful about hiring small, one-person IT firms that only have one or two techs or that outsource this critical role. Everyone gets sick, has emergencies, goes on vacation or takes a few days off from time to time. We have more than enough full-time techs on staff to cover in case one is unable to work.

ALSO: Ask how they will document fixes, changes, credentials for you organization so if one tech is out or unavailable, another can step in and know your network settings, history, previous issues, etc., and how those issues were resolved. This is important or you'll be constantly frustrated with techs who are starting over to resolve a known issue or may screw up something because they don't understand or have a blueprint of your computer network.



## Q10

### Do you offer documentation of our network as part of the plan, and how does that work?

**Our Answer:** Network documentation is exactly what it sounds like: the practice of maintaining detailed technical records about the assets you own (computers, devices, software, directory structure, user profiles, passwords, etc.) and how your network is set up, backed up and secured. Every IT company should provide this to you in both written (paper) and electronic form at no additional cost and update it on a quarterly basis.

Why is this important? There are several reasons:

First, it shows professionalism and integrity in protecting YOU. No IT person or company should be the only holder of the keys to the kingdom. Because we document your network assets and passwords, you have a blueprint you can give to another IT person or company to take over if necessary.

Second, good documentation allows the engineers working on your account to resolve problems faster because they don't waste time fumbling their way around your network trying to find things and uncover accounts, hardware, software licenses, etc.

Third, if you had to restore your network after a disaster, you'd have the blueprint to quickly put things back in place as they were.

All our clients receive this in written and electronic form at no additional cost. We also perform a quarterly update on this material and make sure certain key people from your organization have this information and know how to use it, giving you complete control over your network.

*Side note:* You should NEVER allow an IT person to have that much control over you and your company. If you get the sneaking suspicion that your current IT person is keeping this under their control as a means of job security, get rid of them (and we can help to make sure you don't suffer ANY ill effects). This is downright unethical and dangerous to your organization, so don't tolerate it!

## Q11

### Do you meet with your clients quarterly as part of your managed services agreement?

**Our Answer:** To us, there's nothing more important than face-to-face time with our clients. Therefore, we make it a priority to meet with all our clients at least quarterly (sometimes more often) to provide a "technology review."

In these meetings, we provide you with the status updates of projects you're working on and of the health and security of your network. We also make recommendations for new equipment and upgrades you'll be needing soon or sometime in the near future. Our quarterly meetings with you are C-level discussions (not geek-fests) where we openly discuss your business goals, including your IT budget, critical projects, compliance issues, known problems and cyber security best practices.

Our goal in these meetings is to help you improve operations, lower costs, increase efficiencies and ensure your organizational productivity stays high. This is also your opportunity to give us feedback on how we're doing and discuss upcoming projects.



## Q12

### If I need or want to cancel my service with you, how does this happen and how do you offboard us?

**Our Answer:** Make sure you carefully review the cancellation clause in your agreement. Many IT firms hold their clients hostage with long-term contracts that contain hefty cancellation penalties and will even sue you if you refuse to pay.

We would never "force" a client to stay with us if they are unhappy for any reason. Therefore, we make it easy to cancel your contract with us, with zero contention. We would transfer all your documentation and account information to your new provider. Our "easy out" agreements make us work that much harder to exceed your expectations every day so we keep your business.

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### Q13

## What cyber security certifications do you and your in-house team?

**Our Answer:** It's important that your IT firm have *some* type of *recent* training and certifications, and they should be able to answer this question, which demonstrates a dedication to learning and keeping up with the latest cyber security protections. If they don't have any, and they aren't investing in ongoing training for their engineers, that's a red flag. Some business owners won't invest in training and give this excuse: "What if I spend all this money training my employees and then they leave us for another job?" Our response is "What if you DON'T train them and they stay?"



You can feel confident that our in-house technicians have among the most advanced cyber security training and certifications available, including certifications like CISSP, GCIH, GSNA, GCCC.

### Q14

## How do you lock down our employees' PCs and devices to ensure they're not compromising our network?

**Our Answer:** As above, the question may get a bit technical. The key is that they HAVE an answer and don't hesitate to provide it. Some of the things they should mention are:

- Two factors authentication (2FA)
- Advanced endpoint protection (beyond basic antivirus)
- Encryption of systems hardware and software
- Secure access for remote or home-based team members

Because a combination of these lockdown strategies is essential to protecting your network and data, we employ ALL of these for our clients. Effective cyber security should never compromise between choosing this OR that. It should feature every weapon in your arsenal.

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## Q15

### What cyber liability and errors and omissions insurance do you carry to protect me?

**Our Answer:** Here's something to ask about: if THEY cause a problem with your network that causes you to be down for hours or days, to lose data or get hacked, who's responsible? What if one of their technicians gets hurt at your office? Or damages your property while there?

In this litigious society we live in, you better make darn sure whomever you hire is adequately insured with both errors and omissions insurance, workers' compensation and cyber liability – and don't be shy about asking them to send you the policy to review!



If you get hit with ransomware due to their negligence, someone has to pay for your lost sales, the recovery costs and the interruption to your business operations. If they don't have insurance to cover YOUR losses of business interruption, they might not be able to pay, and you'll have to end up suing them to cover your costs. If sensitive client data is compromised, who's responsible for paying the fines that you might incur and the lawsuits that could happen? No one is perfect, which is why you need them to carry adequate insurance.

True story: A few years ago, a company that shall not be named was slapped with several multimillion-dollar lawsuits from customers for bad behavior by their technicians. In some cases, their techs were accessing, copying and distributing personal information they gained access to on customers' PCs and laptops brought in for repairs. In other cases, they lost a client's laptop (and subsequently all the data on it) and tried to cover it up. Bottom line, make sure the IT firm you're hiring has proper insurance to protect YOU.

Rest assured, we make it a priority to carry all the necessary insurance to protect you, including cyber liability insurance, professional liability, workers' comp and standard business insurances. Simply ask, and we will be happy to show you a copy of our policy.

## Q16

### Who audits YOUR company's cyber security protocols and when was the last time they conducted an audit?

**Our Answer:** Nobody should proofread their own work, and every professional IT consulting firm will have an independent third party reviewing and evaluating their company for airtight cyber security practices.

There are many companies that offer this service, so who they use can vary (there's a number of good ones out there.) If they don't have a professional cyber security auditing firm doing this for them on at least a quarterly basis, or if they tell you they get their peers to audit them, DO NOT hire them. That shows they are not taking cyber security seriously.

You can be confident in the effectiveness of our cyber security because we are audited by Galactic Advisors, and we have just recently been audited April 24<sup>th</sup> of 2023.

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## Q17

### Do you have a SOC and do you run it in-house or outsource it? If outsourced, what company do you use?

**Our Answer:** A SOC (pronounced “sock”), or security operations center, is a centralized department within a company to monitor and deal with security issues pertaining to a company’s network.

What’s tricky here is that some IT firms have the resources and ability to run a good SOC in-house (this is the minority of outsourced IT firms out there.) Others cannot and outsource it because they know their limitations (not entirely a bad thing).



But the key thing to look for is that *they have one*. Less experienced IT consultants may monitor your network hardware, such as servers and workstations, for uptime and patches, but they might not provide security monitoring. This is particularly important if you host sensitive data (financial information, medical records, credit cards, etc.) and fall under regulatory compliance for data protection.

Rest assured, we do have a SOC to provide proactive security monitoring for our clients to better prevent a network violation or data breach.

## Backups And Disaster Recovery:

## Q18

### Can you provide a timeline of how long it will take to get my network back up and running in the event of a disaster?

**Our Answer:** There are two aspects to backing up your data that most business owners aren’t aware of. The first is “fail over” and the other is “fail back.” For example, if you get a flat tire, you would fail over by putting on the spare tire to get to a service station where you can fail back to a new or repaired tire.

If you were to have a disaster that wiped out your data and network – be it a ransomware attack or natural disaster – you want to make sure you have a fail-over solution in place so your employees could continue to work with as little interruption as possible. This fail-over should be in the cloud and locked down separately to avoid ransomware from infecting the backups as well as the physical servers and workstations.

But, at some point, you need to fail back to your on-premise network, and that’s a process that could take days or even weeks. If the backups aren’t done correctly, you might not be able to get it back at all. So, one of the key areas you want to discuss with your next IT consultant or firm is how they handle both data backup AND disaster recovery. They should have a plan in place and be able to explain the process for the emergency fail-over as well as the process for restoring your network and data with a timeline.

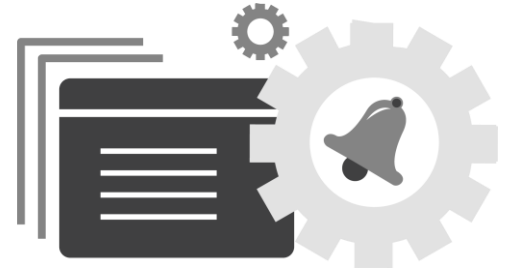
In this day and age, regardless of natural disaster, equipment failure or any other issue, your business should ALWAYS be able to be operational with its data within six to eight hours or less, and critical operations should be failed over immediately.

We understand how important your data is and how getting your team up and running quickly is essential to your business success. Therefore, in the event of any disaster, we can confidently get your network back up and running in 6 hours or less.

## Q19

# Do you **INSIST** on doing periodic test restores of my backups to make sure the data is not corrupt and could be restored in the event of a disaster?

**Our Answer:** A great IT consultant will place eyes on your backup systems every single day to ensure that backups are actually occurring, and without failures. However, in addition to this, your IT company should perform a monthly randomized “fire drill” test restore of some of your files from backups to make sure your data CAN be recovered in the event of an emergency. After all, the **WORST** time to “test” a backup is when you desperately need it.



If you don't feel comfortable asking your current IT company to test your backup OR if you have concerns and want to see proof yourself, just conduct this little test: Copy three unimportant files onto a thumb drive (so you don't lose them) and delete them from your server. Make sure one was newly created that same day, one was created a week earlier and the last a month earlier. Then call your IT company and let them know you've lost three important documents and need them restored from backups as soon as possible. They should be able to do this easily and quickly. If not, you have a problem that needs to be addressed immediately!

Verifying your backups daily and testing them on a regular basis is a cornerstone of a successful overall IT strategy. These are the lengths we go to for all our clients, including multiple random “fire drill” test restores to ensure ALL your files are safe because they are always backed up.



**TIP:** Ask your IT provider about the “3-2-2” rule of backups, which has evolved from the “3-2-1” rule. The 3-2-1 rule is that you should have three copies of your data: your working copy, plus two additional copies on different media (tape and cloud), with at least one being off-site for recovery. That rule was developed when tape backups were necessary because cloud backups hadn't evolved to where they are today.

Today, there are more sophisticated cloud backups and BCDR (business continuity and disaster recovery) devices. Therefore, we recommend three copies of your data stored with two backup copies locally but on different devices. Additionally, store two copies offsite (For example, One copy in a remote location + One copy to the cloud).

**To Schedule Your FREE Assessment,**  
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or call our office at 503-427-1807.

## Q20

### **If I were to experience a location disaster, pandemic shutdown or other disaster that prevented me from being in the office, how would you enable me and my employees to work from a remote location?**

**Our Answer:** If Covid taught us anything, it's that work-interrupting disasters CAN and DO happen when you least expect them. Fires, floods, hurricanes and tornadoes can wipe out an entire building or location. Covid forced everyone into lockdown, and it could happen again.

We could experience a terrorist attack, civil unrest or riots that could shut down entire cities and streets, making it physically impossible to get into a building. Who knows what could be coming down the pike? Hopefully, NONE of this will happen, but sadly it could.

That's why you want to ask your prospective IT consultant how quickly they were able to get their clients working remotely (and securely) when Covid shut everything down. Ask to talk to a few of their clients about how the process went.

In response to the sudden need for remote work, laptops, and security measures during COVID, we successfully met our clients' demands. Specifically, we aided a mid-sized healthcare provider in the spring of 2019. With less than two weeks' notice, they required telehealth services for their 200+ providers, who typically provided service from a medical office. Thanks to our support, the health and mental care services were able to operate seamlessly during the Covid19 lockdown.



## Q21

### **Show me your process and documentation for onboarding me as a new client.**

**Our Answer:** The reason for asking this question is to see if they HAVE SOMETHING in place. A plan, a procedure, a process. Don't take their word for it. Ask to SEE it in writing. What's important here is that they can produce some type of process. Further, they should be able to explain how their process works.

One thing you will need to discuss in detail is how they are going to take over from the current IT company – particularly if the current company is hostile. It's disturbing to me how many IT companies or people will become bitter and resentful over being fired and will do things to screw up your security and create problems for the new company as a childish way of getting revenge. (Sadly, it's more common than you think.) A good IT company will have a process in place for handling this.

If you consider us as your next IT services firm, we will gladly share our new client onboarding process and documentation. I think you'll be impressed.

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## Other Things To Notice And Look Out For:



### **Are they good at answering your questions in terms you can understand and not in arrogant, confusing “geek-speak”?**

Good IT companies won't confuse you with techno-mumbo-jumbo, and they certainly shouldn't make you feel stupid for asking questions. All great consultants have the “heart of a teacher” and will take time to answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms. As you interact with them in the evaluation process, watch for this.

Our technicians are trained to take time to answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms. Just look at what Lionel Roberts with Cedar Grove had to say:



Working with CHR Creative has been monumental to our cybersecurity and IT management. We began working with them after we had a ransomware incident, and within a year they were able to elevate our security profile status and help us get eligible to renew our cyber insurance policy coverage, which we would not have been able to renew without their expertise and direction. Their team has brought a breadth of experience and excellence across various fields of Information Technology, and they made themselves easily accessible and approachable. We appreciate the partnership we have with them and highly recommend them to anyone looking for effective and reliable cybersecurity services.

**- Lionel Roberts, Information Tech Manager,  
Cedar Grove Composting**



### **Do they and their technicians present themselves as true professionals when they are in your office? Do they dress professionally and show up on time?**

If you'd be embarrassed if YOUR clients saw your IT consultant behind your desk, that should be a big red flag. How you do anything is how you do everything, so if they cannot show up on time for appointments, are sloppy with paperwork, show up unprepared, forget your requests and seem disorganized in the meeting, how can you expect them to be 100% on point with your IT? You can't. Look for someone else.

Our technicians are true professionals who you would be proud to have in your office. They dress professionally and show up on time, and if they cannot be there on time (for some odd, unforeseen reason), we always notify the client immediately. We believe these are minimum requirements for delivering a professional service.

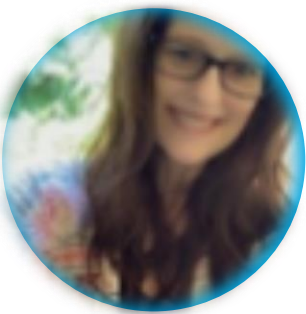
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## Do they have expertise in helping clients similar to you?

Do they understand how your business operates and the line-of-business applications you depend on? Are they familiar with how you communicate, get paid, service your clients or patients and run your business? We have several business focuses and vertical organizations we help succeed. We work well with them because of our broad knowledge and expertise that empower their success. Here's what a few of our clients had to say:



Working with CHR Creative is like working with another member of our team. They have an excellent response rate and help manage initiatives that work for the company, including policies and compliance! CHR is big enough to have all the necessary resources, yet you still get that small-town feeling because they truly know you and your staff's needs.



– **Judy Janssen, Finance Project Manager, Volunteers of America Oregon**



CHR Creative's local presence and expertise have allowed us to make informed decisions to enhance our operations, which is a critical pillar for our significant growth. What sets them apart is their quick turnaround times and personable service. If you're on the fence about choosing an IT firm, I highly recommend CHR Creative. They are dedicated to making their clients successful and always prioritize their needs.



– **Charles Fitz, Operations Manager, Urban League of Portland**



Since having CHR Creative take over our IT and information security management, we have experienced numerous benefits that have positively impacted on our organization. Their expertise is unmatched, and they are always easily accessible for troubleshooting and problem-solving. In addition, their customer-friendly approach has made it easy for us to communicate with them effectively.



– **Kay Toran, President/CEO, Volunteers of America Oregon**

## A Final Word And Free Offer To Engage With Us

I hope you have found this guide helpful in shedding some light on what to look for when hiring a professional firm to outsource your IT support. As I stated in the opening of this report, my purpose in providing this information is to help you make an informed decision and avoid getting burned by incompetent or unethical firms luring you in with cheap prices.

**The next step is simple:** call my office at 503-427-1807 and reference this letter to schedule a brief 10- to 15-minute initial consultation.

On this call, we can discuss your unique situation and any concerns you have and, of course, answer any questions you have about us. If you feel comfortable moving ahead, we'll schedule a convenient time to conduct our proprietary 18-section IT Systems Assessment.

This Assessment can be conducted 100% remotely with or without your current IT company or department knowing (we can give you the full details on our initial consultation call). **At the end of the Assessment, you'll know:**

- ✓ Where you are overpaying (or getting underserved) for the services and support you are currently getting from your current IT company or team.
- ✓ Whether or not your systems and data are *truly* secured from hackers and ransomware and where you are partially or totally exposed.
- ✓ If your data is *actually* being backed up in a manner that would allow you to recover it quickly in the event of an emergency or ransomware attack.
- ✓ Where you are unknowingly violating a compliance requirement, a law such as PCI, HIPAA, or a best practice security framework.
- ✓ How you could lower the overall costs of IT while improving communication, security, and performance, as well as the productivity of your employees.

**Fresh eyes see things that others cannot** – so, at a minimum, our free Assessment is a completely cost- and risk-free way to get a credible third-party validation of the security, stability and efficiency of your IT systems.

**To Schedule Your FREE Assessment,** please visit [www.chrcreative.com](http://www.chrcreative.com) or call our office at 503-427-1807.

With appreciation,



Bryan Christensen, President  
CHR Creative



## See What Other Businesses Are Saying:

### An IT Partner You Can Rely On



Since having CHR take over our IT, the single biggest benefit has been the ability to call with any issue and receive prompt support, whether it's an application, hardware, or vendor issue. The team's ability to troubleshoot takes the stress away from us and allows us to focus on our day-to-day operations. We feel like we're the only client they have, and they consistently solve any problem that arises. Choosing CHR as your IT firm will be the easiest decision you make, and you'll learn to rely on them to help your company move forward.

– **Kari Brown, Practice Administrator, Clackamas and Oregon Pediatrics**

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### CHR Creative – A reliable and effective IT partner



Working with CHR Creative has been a game changer for OMSI. They are prompt and reliable for our IT support and cybersecurity needs, which has been instrumental in reducing downtime and keeping our business running smoothly. CHR Creative's technical expertise and customer service sets them apart from other IT firms we've worked with. Their commitment to understanding our unique needs and tailoring solutions accordingly has made a tremendous difference in the efficiency of our operations. If you're looking for a reliable and effective IT partner, I highly recommend CHR Creative.

– **Michael Alaniz, Information Technology Manager, Oregon Museum of Science Industry.**

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### An Exceptional IT Partner for Your Business



CMT Surveying and Consulting has been working with CHR for some time now and the biggest benefit we have experienced is the sense of security that they provide. After we suffered from a ransomware attack, CHR was able to get us out of the situation quickly and efficiently. In addition to their exceptional security services, what sets them apart from other IT firms is the relationship we have with our account manager. CHR is knowledgeable about our IT and works closely with us to come up with a plan that meets our needs financially while still providing us with strong security measures. We have enjoyed working with the entire CHR team, from the owner to the techs. We feel they truly care about our company and our success.

– **Shaun Fidler, President, CMT Surveying and Consulting**

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### An expert partner for information security and cybersecurity



Enrolling in CHR Creative's Information Security Management and cybersecurity services has helped us by taking the mystery out of the daunting process, which is cybersecurity and compliance. The expertise they provide has allowed us to fully understand the necessary steps required to become more secure and to apply the best practices for cybersecurity services. They clearly understand the IT requirements needed to create a secure environment and have a game plan for how to get you there. If you're on the fence about choosing an IT firm, I highly recommend CHR Creative. They are easy to work with, and they have the expertise to answer all of your questions about what is required to create a cybersecurity-focused environment.

– **Mike VanDooren, VP of Operations, Advanced Navigation and Positioning Company**

# A Final Word And Free Offer To Engage With Us

1

**We Respond Within 5 Minutes Or Less.** The average amount of time it takes for one of our clients to get on the phone with a technician who can start working on resolving their problem is 2 minutes. We know you're busy and we have made a sincere commitment to making sure your computer problems get fixed FAST. And since most repairs can be done remotely using our secure management tools, you don't have to wait around for a technician to show up.

2

**No Geek-Speak.** You deserve to get answers to your questions in PLAIN ENGLISH, not in confusing technical terms. Our technicians will also not talk down to you or make you feel stupid because you don't understand how all this "technology" works. That's our job!

3

**100% No-Small-Print Satisfaction Guarantee.** Quite simply, if you are not happy with our work, we'll do whatever it takes to make it right to YOUR standards without charging you for it. And if we can't make it right, the service is free.

4

**All Projects Are Completed On Time And On Budget.** When you hire us to complete a project for you, we won't nickel-and-dime you with unforeseen or unexpected charges or delays. We guarantee to deliver precisely what we promised to deliver, on time and on budget, with no excuses.

5

**Lower Costs, Waste And Complexity With Cloud Solutions.** By utilizing cloud computing and other advanced technologies, we can eliminate the cost, complexity, and problems of managing your own in-house server while giving you more freedom, lowered costs, tighter security and instant disaster recovery.

6

**We Won't Hold You Hostage.** Many IT companies do NOT provide their clients with simple and easy-to-understand documentation that outlines key network resources, passwords, licenses, etc. By keeping that to themselves, IT companies hold their clients "hostage" to scare them away from hiring someone else. This is both unethical and unprofessional. As a client of ours, we'll provide you with full, written documentation of your network and all the resources, software licenses, passwords, hardware, etc., in simple terms so YOU can understand it. We keep our clients by delivering exceptional service – not by keeping them in the dark.

7

**Peace Of Mind.** Because we monitor all our clients' networks 24/7/365, you never have to worry that a virus has spread, a hacker has broken in or a backup has failed to perform. We watch over your entire network, taking the management and hassle of maintaining it off your hands. This frees you to focus on your customers and running your business, not on your IT systems, security and backups.

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